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SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT
FRIDAY, MAY 16, 2008

In Today's Papers

DTP's Ahmet Turk: A Democratic Project Needed for the PKK to Disarm

Hurriyet, Sabah, Radikal, Taraf, Cumhuriyet, Yeni Safak and others report DTP group chief Ahmet Turk "clarified" his remarks to the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) website. The website reported yesterday Turk commented after his meetings with Iraqi President Jalal Talabani last week, "The armed struggle waged by the PKK harms the interests of the Kurdish people." Islamist-oriented Yeni Safak reports Turk said the remarks belong to Iraqi President Talabani. In a statement released Thursday, Turk said he meant to say Turkey needs to present a democratic plan that includes plans on PKK disarmament and ways to provide a voice to Kurdish identity issues in the political system. "Calls are being made for the disarming of the organization while the government pursues a policy of violence. The Kurdish question cannot be resolved without a democratic project," emphasized Turk. He noted he told the leaders he met in northern Iraq that Kurds should come together and agree on the resolution to the problem on a peaceful basis.

AKP Closure Case

Sabah, Hurriyet, Milliyet, Radikal, Yeni Safak, Vatan, Star and others: Mainstream Sabah and Hurriyet report that Parliament Speaker Koksal Toptan called the Constitutional Court and urged them to find a third solution in the closure case against the AKP. Toptan wants this third way to be more like a "warning" to the party and eliminate the concerns of the secularists, notes Hurriyet. Liberal Radikal reports that during a meeting with the AKP deputies, PM Erdogan said "we are not considering a constitutional amendment. We are in a critical period and we do not want the economy to be affected."

Sabah reports that British Foreign Secretary David Miliband met with CHP leader Deniz Baykal and MHP leader Devlet Bahceli yesterday and told them that closure of the AKP would have devastating results and a harsh reaction from the EU to the closure would be inevitable.

U.S. Ambassador Comments on the AKP Closure Case
Milliyet, Sabah, Zaman, Radikal: Mainstream Sabah carries the

front-page headline, "U.S. Ambassador Says, 'We Are Concerned,'" and notes, "The results of the AKP's closure could be serious." Mainstream Milliyet carried the Ambassador's comments, "We follow developments with interest and with some concern." Liberal Radikal notes the Ambassador would not comment on the specifics of the closure case because he said, "That would not be appropriate for me to do." Islamist-oriented Zaman notes the Ambassador drew attention to "Turkey's strong democratic institutions and traditions."

Montreaux Treaty Rules Relaxed for Queen Elizabeth

Sabah, Milliyet, Hurriyet, Vatan, Bugun, Posta, Yeni Safak: Papers report that on the third day of her visit to Turkey, Queen Elizabeth enjoyed her tour of Istanbul. Queen Elizabeth and her husband Prince Philip visited a high school in Istanbul. Following the visit to the school, the Queen and Prince joined President Gul and his wife for a boat trip on the Bosphorus. Mainstream Milliyet notes that the rules of Montreaux Treaty were relaxed for the Queen so that the air craft carrier HMS Illustrious could enter the Bosphorus. The air craft carrier was allowed to enter the Turkish straits only after leaving its fourteen war planes in Southern Cyprus and disarming its helicopters, Islamist-oriented Yeni Safak reports. All papers report the Queen hosted a reception in honor of President Gul on the ship.

Report Cites Police Brutality, Torture in Nevruz Rallies

Liberal Radikal reports the Turkish Human Rights Foundation (TIHV) report was released concerning incidents in Van, Yuksekova, and Hakkari during Nevruz celebrations. According to the report, police

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used "disproportionate force" while trying to contain the demonstrations, during which four people were killed and 249 detained. An eyewitness said Ikbal Yasar, who lost his life, "was beaten by the police even during his transfer to the hospital," according to the report. The report also states some demonstrators were tortured while in police custody.

AKP Rejects CHP Proposal to Investigate May Day Incidents

Milliyet, Sabah, Radikal, Cumhuriyet, Zaman and others report Turkish Parliament's Human Rights Committee has rejected a proposal of opposition CHP lawmakers for forming a special "sub-committee" to probe police brutality during May Day demonstrations in Istanbul. The Istanbul Governor's Office closed Taksim Square in the heart of Istanbul to demonstrators on May 1; police beat men and women with batons and kicks in order to keep them out of Taksim. Workers were dispersed by police using water cannons, teargas, and truncheons. Police also used teargas in a children's hospital, hurting doctors and patients. A reporter for Cumhuriyet daily suffered a broken arm after being beaten by policemen. Papers strongly criticized the police behavior, saying the ruling AKP government's "mask of democracy" was removed.

Editorial Commentary on Bush in Middle East; US Presidential Candidates

"A Show or A Last Ditch Effort?"

Sami Kohen commented in mainstream Milliyet (5/16): "Some regard President Bush's trip to the Middle East as a farewell, while others see it as the White House's very last effort to resolve the Palestine issue. Nevertheless, there is also a group which considers Bush's trip as a cosmetic show to the world that he works for peace in the Middle East. Regardless of Bush's intention to achieve peace, his presence in the Middle East twice in five months is an important thing by itself. The fact of the matter is that President Bush used to be criticized for not showing enough interest in Middle East peace, but now these visits show that he has changed his attitude. However, if the goal is to find consensus between Israel and Palestine during his term, it is indeed too late. The president's trip is happening during the worst possible conditions vis-à-vis achieving peace. The Annapolis process is experiencing a deadlock, Palestine is divided between Gaza and the West Bank, and civil unrest is emerging in Lebanon under the growing influence of Hezbollah. This makes the whole situation is very complex and dark.

Despite what President Bush hopes, there is no sign of peace by the

end of this year. "

"Turkey Should Be Prepared for Obama"

Hakan Celik wrote in tabloid Posta (5/16): "Unless there is a last minute surprise, Barack Obama will be the candidate for Democrat Party in the upcoming presidential elections. Even Senator Clinton has started to acknowledge that she has fallen behind Obama in this race. In presidential campaigns, the candidates merely focus on domestic issues and they do not usually touch on international matters. However, the staffers in both the Democrat Party and the Republican Party are important figures which will end up assuming high level duties in the next administration. Turkey has been in close contact with Senator Clinton's group, thus we have to work a bit harder to approach Obama's group. So far, lobbyist groups have gained success for their benefit, and they even managed to have Barack Obama pledge recognition of the Armenian genocide. Because the Jewish lobby is not as close to Turkey as it used to be, we should think of establishing a good relationship with the Obama campaign as soon as possible."

TV Highlights

NTV

Domestic News

- Turkey's elite business grouping TUSIAD said French efforts to

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block Turkey's EU membership were against French interests.

- The ashes of soprano Leyla Gencer, "La Diva Turca," who died of cardiac failure in Italy last week, will be scattered in the Bosphorus during a ceremony in Istanbul on Friday.

- The smoking ban in state offices will enter into effect May 19.

International News

- Chinese state media reported the death toll from China's earthquake could soar to over 50,000.

- Turkish and Greek Cypriot leaders Talat and Christofias will meet on May 23 to review the preparations for the peace negotiations which are due to start in June.

- Former Democratic presidential candidate John Edwards endorsed Barack Obama.

WILSON